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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: USUN GUIDANCE ON THE MARCH 26 OCHA
BRIEFING

REF: COLOMBO 308

1. (U) This is an action request please see para 2:

2. (U) USUN should draw from the talking points in para 3 during the March 26 informal OCHA briefing on the humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka. Due to the impossibility of the Council reaching consensus on a joint statement, Mission should draw on para 4 points for a U.S. only statement to the press.

3. (U) Begin Points for OCHA Briefing:

-- The United States has grave concerns about the civilians trapped by the fighting between the security forces of the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The UN estimates that 150,000) 180,000 civilians remain caught in the conflict zone.

-- We welcome the delivery of additional food and medical supplies in the last week, but urge the government to do more. We have received credible reports of significant food shortages in the conflict areas where civilians remain trapped. Aid agencies also report that there are critical shortages of medical supplies and drugs. We call upon the Government of Sri Lanka to give high priority to the transport of essential medical supplies and drugs (including anesthetics) and make every effort to ensure that sufficient food reaches the no-fire zone.

-- Moreover, despite repeated assurances, the Government of Sri Lanka is shelling areas with large concentrations of civilians. We have seen reports that this shelling has continued, at times landing near or hitting hospitals, churches and makeshift shelters. This has resulted in significant civilian casualties. According to UN figures, the civilian death toll is likely over 3000. The Sri Lankan government must stop all shelling into the government-designated safe zone and areas where civilians are known to be present.

-- The LTTE is effectively using civilians as human shields and as a pool for forced conscription. There are reports that LTTE members have shot civilians who have tried to reach government territory. We should call upon the LTTE to release the civilians who they claim to be fighting for and allow for freedom of movement to reach safety.

-- There must be a humanitarian pause so that those who want to leave the conflict zone can do so and so that food and medicine reaches those in need.

-- The Government of Sri Lanka needs to publicly commit to generate conditions that will allow IDPs to return to their place of origin as soon as possible or for their voluntary resettlement to other areas. The international community does not support long-term detention of IDPs in

temporary camps.

-- The Government of Sri Lanka expelled all aid agencies from the Vanni last September as it ramped up its military offensive against the Tigers. The ICRC and the UN have limited access in the Vanni at the moment. The government of Sri Lanka should grant full access by aid agencies to civilians into the Kilinochchi and other screening areas for IDPs, as Secretary Clinton urged in her phone call with President Rajapaksa on March 13. This access should allow these agencies to independently survey the IDPs, as they are currently not permitted to speak to new arrivals.

-- IDP camps in Vavuniya, while improving, still face many problems such as overcrowding, a failure to provide impartial oversight of the registration process and lack of sanitation. Most problematic- IDPs are not permitted freedom of movement. We, and others in the international community, remain concerned about Sri Lankan plans to hold IDPs in these camps beyond the immediate emergency. In connection with this concern, the UNHCR and other donors have agreed that their assistance should not be channeled to these camps beyond a three month time period. The Sri Lankan Government should not be imposing deterrents to civilians who want to leave the combat zone.

-- We believe that lasting peace will only be achieved through a political solution that addresses the legitimate aspirations of all of Sri Lanka's communities. We call on the Sri Lankan Government to put forward a proposal now to engage Tamil voices other than the LTTE in this process.

14. (U) Press Points:

-- We are seriously concerned about the perilous situation in Sri Lanka. A significant number of civilians) by UN estimates, 150,000 to 180,000 civilians) are trapped between the guns of the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). What was once largely an undeveloped area is now a so-called &safe zone8) it is awash in tents and other makeshift shelters, and does not have adequate food stocks, water, medical supplies, and toilet and bathing facilities.

--Shelling by the Government of Sri Lanka continues on a daily basis. According to UN figures, the civilian death toll is likely over 3000. Thousands more have been wounded. We call upon the Government of Sri Lanka to stop shelling areas with large concentrations of civilians. Assurances are not enough, we need to see results. We urge both the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam not to fire into or from the &safe zone,8 even if provoked.

-- We remain deeply concerned that, while a food shipment was recently delivered, the food situation is in the so-called &safe zone8 is in jeopardy, and critical medicines (including anesthetics which are essential for surgeries) have not gone in to the &safe zone8 since February 6.

-- We call on the Government of Sri Lanka to allow regular shipments of desperately needed medical supplies into the conflict area for the treatment of injured civilians trapped in the &safe zone.8

-- There must be a humanitarian pause so that those who want to leave the conflict zone can do so and so that food and medicine reaches those in need.

-- The United States calls on the LTTE to immediately allow civilians free movement out of the conflict area, to lay down their arms, renounce violence, and negotiate term of surrender with the Government of Sri Lanka.

-- We urge both sides (GSL and LTTE) to protect civilians and

allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to
continue to deliver food to the &safe zone8 where civilians
are trapped.

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